

ROAD TRIP 6



The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

RON JONES



The Ultimate
Road Trip Through
the Bible

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**The Gospels and
the Early Church**

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ROUTE 66: THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE BIBLE

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Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Whether you are a seasoned student of the Holy Scriptures or picking up this best-selling book of all time for the first time, get ready for the ride of your life. As your driver along the biblical Route 66, I promise to watch my speed and obey most traffic laws. However, on this sixth road trip, be prepared. We will certainly encounter some road construction along the ancient paths.

The Bible is a collection of holy writ and divine books—sixty-six of them! There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, the Book of books is one story with one main character, the Christ who was to come in the Old Testament and the Christ who came, Jesus, in the New Testament. Therefore, along Route 66, I will make the Christ connection in each Old Testament book and point you to the Jesus juncture in each New Testament book. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son and our Redeemer.

For a book written over the span of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors on three continents and in three different languages, the Bible possesses an amazing continuity. That continuity is one of the arguments made for the Bible's divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The human authors God chose to pen the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments vary significantly in their background, culture, education, occupation, social status, and ability. They were farmers, fishermen, priests, physicians, politicians, kings, and shepherds. God even used a tax collector to write a biography of His Son, Jesus.

If you enjoy literature, you will love the Bible. Holy Scripture contains every form of literature known in academia, including

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poetry, proverb, history, narrative, law, biography, parable, prophetic, apocalyptic, gospel, and letter. Many colleges and universities offer a literature course on the Bible. What other book on the planet inspires people to study it for its literary genius alone?

God used visions and dreams, angels, clay tablets, burning bushes, face-to-face encounters, the spoken and written word, and the jawbone of a donkey to communicate with those He created in His image. He did so because He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

How does one explain so many people over a long period of time writing about God, history, religious life, and more, and yet doing so in perfect editorial harmony, each adding to the overall story? There is only one plausible explanation. The superintending mind of God inspired the writing of these books across many centuries and pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

A well-respected Bible scholar named Norman Geisler writes, “Note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things. There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ. ... There is one message: Humankind’s problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ.”¹

The Gospels and the Early Church

The New Testament begins with four portraits of Jesus Christ, followed by an anthology of the early church, known as the Acts of the Apostles. Like four journalists reporting on the same story but from a different angle, Matthew Mark, Luke, and John present Jesus

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as the Christ to different audiences—Jews, Romans, Greeks, and the Church, respectively. Matthew presents Jesus as King of the Jews; Mark presents Jesus as Jehovah’s Servant; Luke portrays Jesus as the perfect God-man, with an emphasis on His humanity; John gives us many reasons to believe “the Word was God” (John 1:2).

The first three books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are known as the Synoptic Gospels due to their similarity in content, order, and statement. Modern liberal scholars who do not believe in divine inspiration raise the “Synoptic Problem.” They try to explain the similarities and differences in Matthew, Mark, and Luke by introducing a supposed “source” document they call “Q,” from the German word *quell*, which means “source.”

The problem with the Synoptic Problem is that there is no evidence for the Q document, not even a scant scrap of a manuscript. So how do we explain the synopsis in the first three Gospels? Since the same Holy Spirit inspired each of the Gospels written about the same Jesus, we should expect consistency and continuity. Notwithstanding, Luke freely admits to using sources from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-4). If Mark wrote the first Gospel, even with the help of Peter, Matthew and Luke could have used portions of Mark in their writings.²

C.S. Lewis famously offered the following ‘trilemma’ about Jesus in response to the way the Gospels present Him. Because Jesus claimed to be God and the Messiah, He is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Modern critics of Christianity offer a fourth consideration, suggesting the Gospels are legends. This option puts forth the idea that the early Christians glorified Jesus by inflating the stories they wrote about him, making Him appear divine and messianic. The problem with the legend hypothesis is that people are not willing to

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suffer and die to simply perpetuate a legend. Regarding the so-called legend about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which all four Gospel writers record, Chuck Colson famously quipped:

I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because twelve men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for forty years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned, and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled twelve of the most powerful men in the world, and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me twelve apostles could keep a lie for forty years? Absolutely impossible.

Though attacked vigorously by skeptics of the Christian faith, the Gospels have stood the test of time. They are the historically reliable sources of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ; likewise, it seems dubious to me that anyone who lived centuries later could offer a more accurate record. The nearness of the Gospel writings to the actual events makes them trustworthy. Also, Matthew and John were Jesus's disciples, making them eyewitnesses of His majesty, as Peter exclaims (2 Peter 1:16).

Furthermore, though Mark was not one of the Twelve, he apparently used Peter as his primary source, which adds apostolic authority to his writing. Think of Mark's gospel as Peter's memoirs. Luke, the physician and traveling companion of the apostle Paul, interviewed eyewitnesses, carefully researching and documenting his two-volume work (Luke-Acts) with the precision of a scientist.

As useful as this travel guide might be, my words are no replacement for reading the Bible itself. My prayer is that you will fall in love with the Bible as much as I have. More so, I pray that you will

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deeply desire a relationship with its Author. He wrote you a love letter with more than six hundred thousand words because He loves you more than you can imagine.

Are you ready to begin traveling through the New Testament? Climb in, buckle up, and enjoy the ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

DR. RON JONES

Virginia Beach, Virginia

January 2022

Matthew

WHO IS YOUR KING?

Arnold Rothstein “was an American racketeer, crime boss, businessman, and gambler who became a kingpin of the Jewish mob in New York City.”³ Some say he also conspired to fix the 1919 World Series, evidence of the corruption he allegedly organized in professional sports. Not surprisingly, Rothstein famously said, “Look out for Number One. If you don’t, nobody else will,” a common phrase used by people who think primarily of themselves.

So-called kingpins like Rothstein will eventually bow to the King of kings, who is Jesus Christ.⁴ At that time, they will be forced to stop thinking primarily of themselves.

Matthew, a first-century Jewish tax collector, wrote a gospel to the Jews to present Jesus, a rabbi from Nazareth, as the King of the Jews. Matthew offered convincing evidence that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, possessing the proper lineage and all the rights to sit on King David’s throne, plus the throne inside each of our hearts. “Who is your king?” is a fitting question to ask throughout Matthew’s gospel.

The best scholarship says that Matthew penned his gospel after Mark in the middle of the first century (50s and 60s A.D.).⁵ To satisfy



Matthew

WHO IS YOUR KING?

his Jewish audience, Matthew uses a fulfillment formula to link Jesus to the many Old Testament Messianic prophecies. Thirteen times he says that something took place in Jesus's life and ministry to "fulfill the word of the Lord through the prophet."

The King's Birth and Appearance

Matthew begins His gospel with a genealogical record. The genealogy traces the royal lineage of Jesus, which links Him to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Matthew's Jewish audience would have expected this link to be made of anyone making a Messianic claim (1:1-17). Matthew organizes the genealogy into three groups of fourteen names: Abraham to David, David to the Babylonian deportation, the Babylonian deportation to the Christ.⁶

Matthew also includes the names of five women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), and Mary, the mother of Jesus—each with a culturally scandalous story.⁷ For example, two of the women were foreigners (outside the covenant community) that God used to advance His Messianic purposes. Typically, Jewish genealogies did not contain the names of women.

Joseph learns about the supernatural nature of Mary's pregnancy from an angel of the Lord, who appears to him in a dream, saying, "For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (1:20). Matthew immediately links this news to Isaiah's prophecy, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name

JESUS JUNCTURE

Matthew presents Jesus as King of the Jews and the long-awaited Messiah.

BIG IDEA

Make Jesus your Messiah and king.

MEMORY VERSE

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

MATTHEW 1:21

AUTHOR and DATE

Matthew
50s or 60s A.D.



Matthew

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Immanuel (which means God with us). Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem as Micah's prophecy foretold (Micah 5:2). Since then, we mark our calendars by the birth of the King of kings.

Chapter 2 begins with the Magi's visit, unique to Matthew's birth narrative (2:1-23). After bringing their gifts to the child, the wise men depart to their own country by another way, warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the despot, who ordered the killing of all male children below the age of two. Being warned in another dream, Joseph escapes Herod's holocaust, returning to Nazareth safely with Mary and Jesus after Herod's death.

Decades later, Jesus appears as an adult ready to fulfill His Messianic calling. His ministry begins after Matthew records John the Baptizer's preparation ministry (3:1-12), Jesus's baptism by John (3:13-17), Jesus's temptation in the wilderness (4:1-11), and the calling of Jesus's disciples (4:18-22).

The King's Teaching and Miracles

Both John the Baptist and Jesus announced, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," something you would expect a king to say. In chapters 5-7, Jesus sets forth the laws and standards of His kingdom in a major discourse known as the Sermon on the Mount, delivered with authority in a beautiful field on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Sermon on the Mount is the Constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Many Jews believed they must abandon their orthodoxy to follow Jesus. But Jesus made it clear that He came to fulfill the Mosaic law, not abolish it (5:17-20). He raises the bar on righteousness by revisiting the Commandments, using a familiar formula. For example, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has



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already committed adultery with her in his heart” (5:27-28). Jesus tells His disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees (5:20).

Jesus also reflects upon the three pillars of Jewish piety in the kingdom of heaven—giving, praying, and fasting—and taught His followers a model prayer, which begins with the words, “Our Father” (6:1-18). God as Father was a new concept for the Jews. There is much more to Jesus’s kingdom teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (5-7), including what He said about practical matters like money (6:19-24) and worry (6:25-34).

Next, Matthew puts the King’s power, authority, and compassion on display by recording twelve miracles Jesus performed, including the cleansing of a leper (8:1-4), healing Peter’s mother-in-law (8:14-17), and healing two blind men (9:27-31). Signs and wonders accompany Jesus’s ministry as proof that He is the Messiah. In response to Jesus’s growing popularity, the Pharisees accuse Him of blasphemy (9:3). This is the beginning of the conflict that arises between Jesus and the religious leaders.

In chapter 10, Jesus delivers a discourse on discipleship, giving the Twelve (listed by name in 10:2-4) “authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and affliction” (10:1). He sends His disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10:5-15), prepares them for persecution (10:16-25), tells them not to fear (10:26-33), establishes the expectations of discipleship (10:34-39), and introduces kingdom rewards (10:40-42).

Positive and negative responses to Jesus’s ministry follow in chapters 11-15. He delivers another major discourse on the kingdom of heaven (13:1-58) and speaks in parables to conceal the truth from those who reject it. This section of Matthew’s gospel ends with the death of John the Baptist (14:1-12), Jesus feeding thousands of people miraculously (14:13-21, 15:32-39), Jesus walking on water (14:22-36),



Matthew

WHO IS YOUR KING?

and other miracles.

The King's Opposition and Offer

The next major section of the book (16-23) begins with the Pharisees and Sadducees arriving to test Jesus by demanding a sign from heaven. Sarcastically, Jesus gives them a lesson in weather forecasting and then says the generation that seeks for a sign is evil and adulterous. “No sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah” (16:4).

Jesus departs with His disciples and comes to the district of Caesarea Philippi, where He asks them the most important question anyone can answer, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Peter quickly replies, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus affirms Peter’s confession and then reveals the church (*ecclesia*) He will build on the foundation of Peter’s rock-solid response (16:13-20).

Throughout this part of the gospel, Jesus foretells his death and resurrection twice, disturbing the disciples with the news (16:21-23, 17:22-23). He also performs more miracles, teaches more parables, and gently rebukes the mother of two disciples for expecting her sons to receive preferential treatment in the kingdom of God.

At the beginning of the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, King Jesus rides into the holy city on a donkey to fulfill another Old Testament prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-12), presenting Himself as Israel’s Messiah. The euphoric crowds shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (21:1-10). Less than a week later, they executed Jesus on a Roman cross between two thieves. Between His triumphal entry and His crucifixion, Jesus experienced more confrontation with the religious leaders, including the time He cleansed the temple. Matthew



Matthew

WHO IS YOUR KING?

concludes this section by recording seven woes Jesus delivered to the Scribes and Pharisees (23:1-26).

The King's Signs and Prophecies

Early in the final week of Jesus's life, He gathered on the Mount of Olives with four of his disciples—Peter, James, John, and Andrew—to answer their questions about the end of the age. Matthew records the Olivet Discourse in chapters 24-25.

Jesus predicts the following general signs will appear like “birth pangs” at the end of the age: False Christs, natural disasters, wars, persecution, pestilence, apostasy, lawlessness, and the worldwide preaching of the gospel (24:4-14). Then, Jesus jumps forward in Bible prophecy to the midpoint of the Tribulation and reveals a specific sign known as “the abomination that causes desolation” (24:15-28), first spoken of by Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27). This prophecy describes when the Antichrist will desecrate the Jewish temple and unleash peril on the earth, “such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be” (24:21).

Then, Christ predicts His glorious return but reminds His disciples that nobody knows the day or the hour of His second advent (24:29-51). Jesus adds two parables to His prophetic teaching. The Parable of the Ten Virgins (25:1-13) encourages readiness, while the Parable of the Talents (25:14-30) encourages faithfulness. The wide-ranging discourse ends with a sobering description of judgment at the end of the age, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, separating the sheep from the goats (25:31-46).

The King's Rejection and Triumph

Following Jesus's predictions about the end of the age, Matthew



Matthew

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moves carefully through the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of our Lord (26-28). He begins with Jesus predicting His passion by saying to His disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified” (26:2). Matthew follows with a description of the religious leaders conspiring against Jesus with political calculation.

In Bethany, at the home of Simon, the leper, a woman anoints Jesus with an alabaster flask of expensive oil. Then, Matthew records the Passover meal Jesus held with His disciples in the Upper Room, followed by the prayer meeting in Gethsemane. Judas arrives at the garden and betrays Jesus with a kiss, a signal to the soldiers who came to arrest Jesus and take Him to Caiaphas, the high priest. As Jesus predicted earlier, Peter follows and denies Jesus three times before the rooster crows (26:6-75).

Caiaphas sends Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman official who presides over Jesus’s trial and orders His crucifixion. At the request of the angry mob, Pilate releases Barabbas, a criminal, instead of Jesus. What might have looked like a good man falling victim to religious politics and mobocracy was the unfolding of the eternal plan of God to redeem lost sinners. Thus, Jesus, who resolved to do the Father’s will, shows remarkable restraint throughout His betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

Before they nailed Jesus to the cross, Roman soldiers ridiculed Him. Matthew writes, “And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, ‘Hail King of the Jews!’” (27:28-29). The point of Matthew’s gospel is that Jesus is everything they say He is by their mockery. After spitting on Him, they led Jesus away to be crucified, taking Him to “a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull)” (27:33).



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Matthew records only one of the seven cries Jesus made from the cross. Around the ninth hour, He cried out in loneliness, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (27:46). Moments later Jesus died. Then, four dramatic events happened that seemed to validate Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews. First, the thick veil of the temple tore in two, from top to bottom, something human hands could not do. Second, an earthquake splits rocks and opens tombs. Third, dead saints rise to life and walk out of the tombs. After Jesus’s resurrection, Matthew says the resurrected saints appeared to many in Jerusalem. Fourth, a Roman centurion observes what is happening and says, “Truly, this was the Son of God!” (27:51-56).

They buried Jesus in a tomb given to Him by a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin and secret follower of Jesus. Remembering that Jesus said He would rise from the dead three days later, Pilate secures the tomb “by sealing the stone and setting a guard” (27:66). However, the grave could not hold Him. Three days later, “after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week” (28:1), Jesus rose from the dead as He predicted, validating His Messianic claim. The Roman centurion was right—Jesus was and is the Son of God!

Ironically, women came to the tomb first and then announced the good news to the disciples.⁸ When the chief priests learned all that had taken place, they bribed the soldiers to say the disciples stole the body, which was the first of many unproven theories attempting to discredit the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Matthew completes his gospel with Jesus appearing to His disciples on a mountain, telling them to “make disciples of all nations” (28:16-20). They give their lives to fulfill the Great Commission because Jesus Christ is much more than a kingpin like Arnold Rothstein; He is truly the King of the Jews and Savior of the world. So, who is your king?



Matthew

WHO IS YOUR KING?

OUTLINE	1-4	5-15	16-23	24-25	26-28
FOCUS	The King's Birth and Appearance	The King's Teaching and Miracles	The King's Opposition and Offer	The King's Signs and Prophecies	The King's Rejection and Triumph
KEY VERSE	1:21	5:17	21:5	24:3	28:5-6



Mark

He came TO SERVE

Do words or actions establish a person's credibility more? Most of us would say that a person's actions speak louder than their words. Thus, the saying goes, "if you're going to talk the talk, you must walk the walk". Has anyone ever said that to you? "Practice what you preach" is another way of saying the same thing.

When it comes to establishing the credibility of Jesus, who claimed to be the Christ, both His words and works matter. J. Dwight Pentecost wrote a monumental book titled, *A Harmony of the Words and Works of Jesus Christ*. Long ago, Mark, the Evangelist, did the same by writing a summary of Jesus's ministry. The Gospel According to Mark focuses primarily on Jesus's works to validate His Messianic claim, not His major discourses, which is why Mark's gospel is shorter than Matthew's.⁹ For Mark and his Gentile audience, actions speak louder than words.

Mark's gospel paces like an action-thriller, quickly moving the reader from one scene in Jesus's life and ministry to the next. By using the word "immediately" (*euthus*) more than forty times in the book, Mark gives the sense that Jesus was always on the move, though never hurried—serving, healing, preaching, and making disciples, while



Mark

HE CAME TO SERVE

always focused on His goal of fulfilling the Father's redemptive purposes through His atoning sacrifice on the cross. In the original language, twelve of sixteen chapters begin with the word "and," giving the same forward-moving sense.

Who was Mark?

The Gospel According to Mark first raises questions about the author himself. Who was Mark, and what gave him the authority to write one of the four gospels? Mark was not even one of the original twelve disciples that Jesus called to follow Him. However, Peter called Mark "my son" (1 Peter 5:13), which gave birth to the tradition that Peter led Mark to faith in Jesus Christ and disciplined him. If that is true, and if Peter was Mark's primary source, as some suggest, then Mark's gospel could be called The Gospel According to Peter or Peter's memoirs, giving sufficient apostolic authority to the text.

Mark never refers to himself in his gospel.¹⁰ Rather, he appears for the first time in Acts 12:12, following Peter's miraculous escape from prison at night. Peter retreats to the house of Mary, Mark's mother, where the early Christians had gathered for prayer. Furthermore, Mark and Barnabas were cousins (Colossians 4:10), which is why Mark, whose other name is John, accompanied Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey (Acts 10:25, 13:5). However, Mark infamously quit in the middle of the journey and went home, infuriating the apostle Paul. Mark, a Jewish believer, might have disagreed with Paul's emphasis

JESUS JUNCTURE

Mark presents Jesus as Jehovah's Servant.

BIG IDEA

Jesus's works speak as loudly as His words.

MEMORY VERSE

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

MARK 10:45

AUTHOR and DATE

Mark
50s or 60s A.D.



Mark

HE CAME TO SERVE

on reaching the Gentiles with the gospel.

Whatever the reason for Mark's departure, Paul and Barnabas "had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company" when Barnabas suggested Mark should assist them on their second missionary journey (Acts 15:39). Years later, it appears Paul and Mark reconciled, assuming the Mark that Paul refers to as a "fellow worker" and "very useful to my ministry" is John Mark (Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11). Ironically, and perhaps to the point, Mark writes his gospel to the Gentiles, which is why he does not link Jesus to the Old Testament Messianic prophecies as much as Matthew does, who writes to the Jews.

Furthermore, if the John Mark we read about in Acts is Mark, the Evangelist, who penned The Gospel According to Mark, then, according to tradition, he also founded the church in Alexandria, Egypt, one of the most prominent churches in early Christianity, and served as its first bishop (49 A.D.).¹¹ At the time, the three cities with the largest Jewish populations were Babylon, Alexandria, and Jerusalem.

It was this Mark who presented Jesus to the Gentile world as the Son of Man who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). According to Mark, Jesus was a Spirit-filled servant (1:1-14), serving servant (1:15-10:52), suffering servant (11:1-15:47), and special servant of God (16:1-20). Let's take a closer look.

The Spirit-filled Servant

Mark skips over Jesus's early years and starts at "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1), linking Isaiah's prophecy about Messiah's forerunner to John the Baptist's ministry. The Evangelist follows with Jesus's baptism by John and His



Mark

HE CAME TO SERVE

temptation in the wilderness (1:1-14). The baptism of Jesus is such a monumental event that all four gospel writers record it.

Jesus identified with lost sinners through water baptism; He also portrayed His future death, burial, and resurrection as He “came up out of the water,” even as the Father publicly affirmed His one and only Son. Mark writes, “And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’” (1:11). The Holy Spirit also descended on Jesus like a dove. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all present, making New Testament baptism trinitarian.¹²

This was not the time when Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. Rather, the Holy Spirit rested upon Jesus when He was in Mary’s womb and never departed from Him, something the prophets predicted would accompany Messiah’s arrival (Isaiah 11:2, 42:1, 8:16, 61:1). Reflecting upon Jesus’s baptism, Peter pointed out “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:36-38). Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus demonstrated what it looks like to walk by the Spirit without interruption (Galatians 5:23). Surely, Jesus came to serve, but He served lost sinners and the Father’s purposes in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Serving Servant

In the long narrative that follows (1:15-10:52), Mark supports the beginning notion that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God by showing us the way He served. Mark records twenty of Jesus’s miracles and eight of His parables. The Evangelist also provides unique insight into how Jesus prepared to serve by observing His spiritual disciplines, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (1:35).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record the Transfiguration of Jesus,



Mark

HE CAME TO SERVE

a time when Jesus becomes radiant in glory before Peter, James, and John on a mountaintop. The purpose of the Transfiguration was for Jesus to show His inner circle of disciples more of His identity. Through Jesus's dramatic change in appearance, His disciples became eyewitnesses of His majesty and deity, something they never forgot. Peter also mentions the stunning event, and John possibly alludes to it (1 Peter 1:16-18; John 1:14).

The most significant way Jesus served was by offering His life as an atoning sacrifice, which is perhaps why Mark records Jesus telling His disciples about His death and resurrection three times (8:31-33, 9:30-32, 10:33-34). The first time, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him, to which Jesus replied, "Get behind me, Satan!" The second time, Mark says of the disciples, "But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him." From 8:31 forward, Mark's focus is the cross.

Following each revelation about His future, Jesus teaches His followers about the demands of discipleship, starting with, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34). Next, in response to a self-aggrandizing discussion the disciples had among themselves, Jesus says, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (9:35). Finally, in contrast to Gentile rulers who lord it over people, Jesus says to His disciples, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:43-45).

The Suffering Servant

Mark uses forty percent of his book to describe what happened during the last eight days of Jesus's life and ministry. In fulfillment



Mark

HE CAME TO SERVE

of Zechariah 9:9, chapter 11 begins with Mark's account of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the first time Jesus publicly presents Himself as Israel's Messiah. Until then, Jesus seems reluctant for the crowds to know who He is, which scholars refer to as Mark's "messianic secret." For example, Jesus silences demons who try to identify Him (1:25, 34, 3:11-12, 5:7) and censors the people He heals (1:44, 5:43, 7:36, 8:26). He also instructs His disciples not to tell anyone that He is the Messiah (8:30, 9:9). Why is Jesus so buttoned-up about His identity?

The Jews expected a warrior Messiah who would overthrow the Romans, establish God's kingdom on earth, and usher in Israel's golden age. However, Jesus came first as the Suffering Servant who defeats sin, Satan, and death through His atoning sacrifice on the cross and resurrection. By squashing the messianic expectations of the Jews early in His ministry, Jesus sidesteps their inclination to make Him king on their terms and in their time.

Following His entrance into the Holy City days before Passover, Jesus vexes the religious leaders by cursing a fig tree (11:12-14), cleansing the temple of moneychangers (11:15-19), and challenging the teaching and authority of the Pharisees (11:27-33, 12:13-37). He also tells a parable that suggests the religious leaders are like evil farmers who mismanage God's vineyard (12:1-11). None of this helps Jesus win friends and influence people. The chief priests and scribes respond by plotting His execution (11:18, 12:12, 14:1).

What follows could be explained as a good man landing on the wrong side of religious politics. However, the eyes of faith see Jesus yielding His will to the Father's eternal plan to redeem lost sinners through the blood sacrifice of His one and only Son.

After Jesus prays "not what I will, but what you will" in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas betrays Him with a kiss; the rest of the disciples abandon Him, running scared into the night (14:10-52).



Mark

HE CAME TO SERVE

The Roman soldiers who arrest Jesus lead him to the high priest. Peter appears in Caiaphas's courtyard and denies Jesus three times as various strangers identify Him as one of Jesus's disciples.

Early in the morning, the religious leaders gather to discuss the situation and then take Jesus to Pilate, who oversees a trial that mocks justice and orders “the King of the Jews” crucified. Jesus is so alone on the cross that He even cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (15:34), in fulfillment of Psalm 22:1. Darkness covers the land from noon to three o'clock in the afternoon, at which time Jesus dies.

The Special Servant

If Mark's gospel is the first, then 16:1-8 is the earliest record of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. With an economy of words, Mark places three women—Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome—at Jesus's tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week. He shares their emotions and the quandary they face as they bring spices to anoint Jesus's body. “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb” (16:3). As they get closer, they see that someone has already rolled the large stone away. They step inside, and alarm grips them when they see a man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side.

And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” 16:6-7

The divine messenger, probably an angel, invites the women to come and see. He was not afraid of full transparency. Christianity has always invited inquiry and investigation, as opposed to cults that



Mark

HE CAME TO SERVE

often shroud their beliefs in mystery behind closed doors. Then, the angel of the Lord told the women to go and tell Jesus’s disciples what happened. Mark adds “and Peter,” a detail that suggests Peter, who had betrayed the Lord, received His grace.¹³

Mark’s gospel ends abruptly, leaving verses 9-20 in question. However, there is no doubt that Jesus came to serve, and His service ultimately validates His Messianic claim.

OUTLINE	1:1-14	1:15 - 10:52	11:1 - 15:47	16:1-20
FOCUS	Spirit-filled Servant	Serving Servant	Suffering Servant	Special Servant
KEY VERSE	1:10-11	10:45	15:39	16:6



Luke

BEHOLD THE MAN

Who is the greatest man who ever lived? A question like that could spur a long debate among scientists, humanists, business and political leaders, even religious leaders. Of course, you would expect a pastor like me to say, Jesus.

Arguably, Jesus of Nazareth is the greatest man who ever lived. I say this emphatically, even though Jesus said John the Baptist was the greatest man born among women for the way he served (7:28). Jesus is the greatest, not only because of the way He served humanity but also because He is the perfect God-man, something even the greatest humanist must concede.

Jesus was not God alone or man alone; He was fully human and fully divine in a unified existence. Christian theologians refer to this as the incarnation, also the hypostatic union, which sounds like a fancy term in English but is quite simple yet profound. The word *hypostatic* means personal. Thus, the hypostatic union is the personal union of Jesus's two natures. David Mathis writes, "The hypostatic union is the joining (mysterious though it be) of the divine and the human in the one person of Jesus."¹⁴

If Matthew presents Jesus as King of the Jews, and Mark



Luke

BEHOLD THE MAN

portrays Him as Jehovah's Servant, Luke portrays Jesus as the perfect God-man, with an emphasis on His humanity. "Behold the Man!" is Luke's main thrust, which makes sense because he writes to the Greeks, who mused much about humanity and embraced the gods and goddesses of Greek Mythology. In Luke's gospel, we see God manifest in the flesh primarily, a Savior who identifies fully with our humanity and yet soars sinlessly and excellently above it.

An Orderly Account

Luke, the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14), was the apostle Paul's close friend, ministry colleague, and traveling companion. He was with Paul in Rome when the Emperor, Nero, beheaded the great champion of the faith (2 Timothy 4:11). The strongest biblical evidence supports the idea that Luke was a gentile (Colossians 4:10-14), making him the only non-Jewish contributor to the New Testament. However, some argue that he was a Hellenistic Jew. His skills in the Greek language are impressive, making Luke's gospel the most splendid literary presentation of Jesus's life and ministry.

Luke wrote a two-volume anthology of the life of Christ and the early church, known as Luke-Acts. In the introductions to both books (1:1-4, Acts 1:1-3), he addresses his friend Theophilus, who was probably a Greek businessman who underwrote the cost of Luke's research, which the careful scientist compiled from the eyewitnesses of Jesus's life and ministry. No doubt,

JESUS JUNCTURE

Primarily, Luke presents Jesus's humanity, God manifest in the flesh.

BIG IDEA

Jesus was man enough to feel our pain and God enough to do something about it.

MEMORY VERSE

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

LUKE 19:10

AUTHOR and DATE

Luke
60 A.D.



Luke and Theophilus shared Paul's burden for gospel evangelism to the Gentiles, particularly the Greeks. They desired historically reliable documentation of the Christian faith.

Behold His Birth and Boyhood

Luke starts with the birth of Jesus, as Matthew does; however, Luke lingers longer on the nativity and has a different emphasis. While Matthew starts with a genealogy that links Jesus prophetically to the Davidic throne, Luke inserts the genealogy after Jesus's baptism (3:23-38), placing primary importance on His humanity through the childhood narratives. Another difference is that Matthew's genealogy goes back to Abraham; Luke's genealogy returns to Adam, the first man, linking Jesus, the second Adam, to the first (1 Corinthians 15:45).¹⁵

Luke provides a fuller understanding of the familial relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus by interspersing their birth announcements and ministry preparations. He includes a wholesome visit between their mothers, who were both pregnant at the time. When Mary arrives at her cousin's home and greets Elizabeth, Elizabeth's baby leaps in her womb. Elizabeth graciously says to Mary, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!". Then, Luke makes one of several references to the Holy Spirit's presence in the Christmas story (1:39-45, 67).

Luke records birth and boyhood episodes from the life of Jesus not found in the other gospels. For example, from Luke we learn about the historic decree made by Caesar Augustus that providentially moved Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem and into prophetic position (2:1-8). We hear the angels bring "good news of great joy" about Messiah's birth to the humble shepherds (2:8-21). We also sing four unique hymns related to Messiah's arrival, including Mary's



Magnificat (1:46-55), Zachariah's Benedictus (1:67-79), the angel's Gloria in Excelsis (2:14), and Simeon's Canticle (2:29-32). Luke invites us to attend the circumcision of the eight-day-old baby and consider His presentation at the temple, according to the Mosaic law (2:21-38).

Furthermore, we feel the panic inside the hearts of two first-time parents. After celebrating the Passover feast and starting their journey home to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph realize "the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem" (2:39-52). Oops! They lost the Messiah! Then, we stand amazed when they retrace their steps and find their twelve-year-old son in the temple, sitting among the teachers and astounding them with His wisdom.

Angels appear to Zacharias, Mary, and the shepherds, reminding us that the Christ child is both human and divine. Although we wish for more insights into Jesus's early childhood, Luke provides two summaries by saying, "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him" (2:40), and "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man (2:52).

Luke concludes this first section with Spirit-filled Jesus emerging victoriously from forty days of fasting in the wilderness and being tempted by the devil (4:1-13). As a man, Jesus was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

Behold His Miracles and Parables

The next major section of the book (4:14-9:50) begins with Jesus returning to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. While in His hometown, Nazareth, Jesus attends the synagogue and picks up Isaiah's scroll to read the following words, which only Luke records, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to



Luke

BEHOLD THE MAN

proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18-19).

After rolling up the scroll and returning it to the attendant, Jesus sits down and begins applying the Old Testament Messianic prophecy to Himself. "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:22). For those who say Jesus never claimed to be God or the Messiah, Luke provides positive proof that He did. By referring to the ministry of Elijah, the prophet to Naaman the Syrian, Jesus goes on to suggest to His hometown friends that Messiah was not there's alone. Offended by His words, they ran Jesus out of town to the edge of a cliff. Before they throw Him down, the Miracle Man walks through their midst untouched (4:16-30).

Then, Luke puts the Son of Man's compassionate humanity on display by recording sixteen miracles performed by Jesus, who is never too busy to care for people's real human needs.¹⁶ Luke also emphasizes Jesus's ability to touch humanity through His parables. All but two of the twenty parables Luke records start with words like, "There was a certain man ...". Matthew, on the other hand, emphasizes the kingdom of heaven with parables that begin, "The kingdom of heaven is like ...".

Another way Luke highlights Jesus's human sympathies is by featuring the prominent place women held in His ministry, including those who "provided for them out of their means" (8:1-3).¹⁷ Along the way, Jesus foretells His death and resurrection twice (9:21-22, 43-45), followed by the first time Jesus rebuked His disciples for their conversation about who was the greatest (9:46-48).



Behold His Journey to Jerusalem

The longest section within Luke's gospel, comprising thirty-five percent of the book, can also be the most challenging to read. Known as Luke's travelogue, 9:51-19:57 appears to wander aimlessly without any sense of organization and plot other than the idea that Jesus had "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (9:51). Around this idea, we can make some attempt to arrange Luke's thinking as he reminds his readers at least three more times that Jesus is "on the way" (10:38, 13:22, 17:11). These reminders happen around a weighty question someone poses to Jesus followed by His answer, plus a montage of miracles, parables, discipleship teaching, and confrontations with the religious leaders.

Jesus's ministry grows, but so does the opposition to Him as He travels closer to Jerusalem for the final time. For example, someone accuses Him of casting out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, to which He responds, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls" (11:14-23).

Also, while dining privately with a few Pharisees, the conversation grows tense. Jesus delivers a series of divine woes aimed at religious hypocrites, which lands like a thud in the middle of the table. Luke writes, "As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say" (11:53-54).

The epic travel narrative contains more unique material and much that illustrates Jesus's compassionate humanity, including the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), Parables of the Lost Sheep, Coin, and Son (15:1-32), and the Parable of the Publican who humbles himself before God and found mercy (18:11-14). Luke includes two parables Jesus delivered to encourage persistence



in prayer (11:5-13, 18:1-8). He also records the real-life story (not a parable) that Jesus told of two men, one rich and one poor, who died and entered the afterlife with different experiences (16:19-31). These stories, and ones that follow, point to Luke's emphasis on the human connections Jesus made.

Closer to Jerusalem, Luke presents Jesus's encounter with a tax collector named Zacchaeus, who became an unlikely recipient of salvation (19:1-10). As Jesus makes His way to the Holy City to offer His life as an atonement for sin, He is clearly seeking the lost, like Zacchaeus, for the purpose of saving them (19:10).

Behold His Travesty and Triumph

Luke moves quickly through the familiar scenes associated with Jesus's betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion, but He also offers some unique insights. For example, during the Passover meal He shares with His disciples, Jesus institutes an ordinance of the church known as the Lord's Supper. Luke gives us these familiar words relating to the bread, which memorializes the broken body of our Lord, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (22:19).

When describing Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Dr. Luke writes, "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (22:44). The physician notices the real stress that came upon the Great Physician's human body, producing a condition called hematomidrosis (sweating blood). Luke leaves no room for doubting that Jesus suffered real human pain even before they scourged His body and nailed Him to the cross.

Luke also records three of Jesus's seven cries from the cross. As cruel malefactors drive spikes into His hands and feet, Jesus cries



Luke

BEHOLD THE MAN

out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (23:32-38). He says to the thief on the cross next to Him, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (23:35-43). And, according to Luke, moments before Jesus exhaled His last breath, He said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (23:44-49). In keeping with Luke’s emphasis on Jesus’s humanity, he records the centurion who witnessed Jesus’s death as saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” (23:47).

Luke’s gospel reaches its climax in chapter 24 with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To this part of the anthology, Luke adds several post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, validating the story through actual eyewitnesses. He starts with two men who encountered Jesus while walking along the road to Emmaus (24:13-35). Astounded by the experience, Cleopas and his friend return to Jerusalem and tell the eleven remaining disciples. Then, Jesus appears to His disciples, and Luke concludes with Jesus’s ascension.

In all, Luke wants us to know that Jesus is the perfect God-man, who is man enough to feel our pain and God enough to do something about it.

OUTLINE	1:1 - 4:13	4:14 - 9:50	9:51 - 19:27	19:28 - 24:53
FOCUS	Birth and Boyhood	Miracles and Parables	Journey to Jerusalem	Travesty and Triumph
LOCATION	Israel	Galilee	Israel	Jerusalem
KEY VERSE	2:11	4:18-19	19:10	24:6



John

REASONS TO BELIEVE

The Santa Clause starring actor and comedian Tim Allen is a popular Christmas movie franchise, including *The Santa Clause*, *The Santa Clause 2*, and *The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause*.

After Santa dies accidentally in Scott Calvin's front yard on Christmas Eve, Calvin (played by Allen) and his son Charlie travel magically to the North Pole, where Calvin learns he must become Santa by the next Christmas. Calvin thinks he is dreaming until he starts gaining weight and reindeer begin following him. Also, Calvin shaves his face, looks in the mirror, and immediately grows a white beard. These oddities convince him that he is Santa, and he prepares for Christmas Eve.

After delivering gifts to children around the world for the first time, the new Santa returns to the North Pole to reflect on his strange experience. From the balcony of his bedroom, Calvin sees a polar bear directing traffic in the town square. He turns to Judy, an adorable elf, and says, "I see it, but I don't believe it." Judy replies convincingly, "But Santa, seeing isn't believing; believing is seeing."

Three cheers for elf Judy! Believing *is* seeing. To say it another way: As Christians, we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). The apostle John, who penned *The Gospel According to John*,



John

REASONS TO BELIEVE

and elf Judy might not agree on the North Pole, but they certainly agree on the idea that belief always precedes sight. We see what we believe if what we believe is true.

John, the beloved disciple (13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7), writes with belief in mind, which he expresses in his Gospel purpose statement, appearing at the end of the book: “But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). Engaging belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is John’s focused goal. He gives his readers many reasons to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, the Son of God. Thus, in John’s mind, there is only one proper response to Jesus’s life and ministry: Believe. And when we believe in Jesus, He will open our eyes to see the beauty and wonder of His grace.

The Beloved Disciple

Who is John, the beloved disciple of Jesus? After the apostle Paul, John is the most prolific writer in the New Testament, having penned The Gospel According to John, three epistles, and The Revelation of Jesus Christ. He was part of Jesus’s inner circle, which also included Peter and James, John’s brother. Jesus’s nickname for James and John was “Sons of Thunder.” The sons of Zebedee must have been a handful for their mother, Salome, who did what she could to position her boys within Jesus’s kingdom enterprise (Matthew 20:20-28).

After Jesus’s resurrection and ascension, both James and John played a significant role in the start of the early church (Galatians

JESUS JUNCTURE

John presents Jesus as the Word who became flesh and dwelled among us.

BIG IDEA

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

MEMORY VERSE

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

JOHN 3:16

AUTHOR and DATE

John
85 -90 A.D.



2:9; Acts 3:1, 4:13, 8:14). Tradition says that John also served the church at Ephesus before the Romans exiled him to the island of Patmos, where he received and recorded The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Word Became Flesh

Not considered among the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and written later (85-90 A.D.), John's Gospel contains much unique material about Jesus's life and ministry while omitting other aspects of it that Matthew, Mark, and Luke include. For example, John has no account of the birth, baptism, or temptation of Jesus. Descriptions of the last supper, Jesus's agonizing prayer in Gethsemane, and the ascension are also missing.

Unlike the Synoptics, John introduces Jesus Christ to the world by linking Him to the *Logos*, translated "Word" (1:1-14). *Logos* was a Greek concept that connected with the most sophisticated philosophical thinkers in the first century. John opens with a flashback to Genesis and the creation story by saying, "In the beginning was the Word" (1:1).

For centuries, Greek philosophers had been dreaming, thinking, and talking about the *Logos* and its role in the creation of the universe. However, their understanding of the *Logos* never advanced beyond an abstract philosophical concept. They mused about the *Logos* as a force in the universe, in a Star Wars kind of way. John blew their minds wide open with ten tons of theological dynamite when he said the *Logos* was a real person, a God-man, who came to live among them.

The Word is eternal, part of the Holy Trinity, and full deity (1:1-2). Furthermore, the Word is the creator of all things, the source of life, and truth (1:3-5). Finally, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14), humanity and humility on full display in the God-man. The significance of John's opening statement about Jesus



cannot be overestimated. William Barclay writes, “The first chapter of the Fourth Gospel is one of the greatest adventures of religious thought ever achieved by the mind of man.”¹⁸

John 3:16

Of course, John’s gospel contains the most quoted verse in all the Bible, John 3:16, which reads, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This verse came from a conversation Jesus had with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, to whom Jesus also said, “You must be born again” (John 3:3). John 3:16 is the gospel in a nutshell.

With poetic flare, pastor and author Max Lucado describes John 3:16 as “a twenty-six-word parable of hope, beginning with God, ending with life, and urging us to do the same. Brief enough to write on a napkin or memorize in a moment, yet solid enough to weather two thousand years of storms and questions. If you know nothing of the Bible, start here. If you know everything in the Bible, return here. We all need the reminder. The heart of the human problem is the heart of the human. And God’s treatment is prescribed in John 3:16.”¹⁹

In his book *God Loves You*, David Jeremiah writes, “John 3:16 has long been regarded as our greatest, most direct, and most concise statement of the Gospel. With almost miraculous precision, it places the good news of the love of God in the smallest of packages. When you say ‘John 3:16,’ even many unbelievers either know what it means or know the verse itself. It is the most famous book-chapter-verse reference in the entire Bible. You’ll see it on a banner at a sporting event, emblazoned on a T-shirt, or scrawled in graffiti on an underpass. It’s a shorthand way of saying, ‘God loves us all.’”²⁰



Seven “I Am” Statements

John also records seven self-identifying statements Jesus made, beginning with the words “I am.” Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life” (6:35), “I am the light of the world” (8:12), “I am the door of the sheep” (10:9), “I am the Good Shepherd (10:11), “I am the resurrection and the life (11:25), “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6), and “I am the true vine” (15:6).

Jesus is the same “I am” who appeared to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses inquired of God’s name, the Lord replied, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14). I know it sounds like a strange name. But do not confuse God’s name with a line from a Dr. Seuss book. *I am Sam. Sam I am. I love to eat green eggs and ham.* The meaning of this divine name is not childish. In fact, the name in Hebrew is *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*, the sacred name that Jews would not pronounce aloud because they revered it so much. Jesus spoke the Greek version, *ego eimi*. In both languages, the name means, “I am the absolute and all-sufficient one who works on your behalf.”

John presents Jesus to us as the great I Am. What a powerful name it is! Jesus is not the great I was or the great I will be; He is the great I am. When Roman soldiers raided the Garden of Gethsemane hours before His crucifixion, Jesus asked them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am he.’ ... When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (18:4-7). The mere mention of His powerful name blew stout Roman soldiers to the ground.

Thus, the seven self-identifying statements spoken by Jesus reveal He is eternally self-existent, powerful beyond measure, secure in His identity, and uniquely qualified to satisfy our deepest needs. They also powerfully present Jesus as the deity.

Understanding each “I am” statement within its larger context is a worthwhile study, and so much more could be said. Suffice it to say, knowing who Jesus is and what He can do for you is vitally



important. Knowing why Jesus is unique in our diverse, syncretistic culture is equally meaningful. Why Jesus and not Muhammad, or Buddha, or one of the many gods of Hinduism? John demonstrates why the great I Am is the one and only begotten of God. He makes the strong, irrefutable case for why we should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ exclusively and live through Him.

Eight Sign Miracles

John also weaves stories into his Gospel of eight sign miracles performed by Jesus. Do you believe in miracles? Do you need a miracle? During His three-year earthly ministry, Jesus touched and physically transformed so many people that the libraries of the world would not have enough room for the books that could be written about Him. The four gospels record thirty-seven of Jesus's miracles. John highlights eight of them as signs that point to Jesus as the Messiah.

According to John, Jesus turned water into wine (2:1-11), healed a nobleman's son (4:46-54), and healed a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years and was unable to walk (5:1-17). Jesus also fed five thousand men and their families with a few loaves of bread and small fish (6:1-15). Jesus walked on water. (6:16-21), restored sight to the blind (9:1-41), raised the dead (11:1-46), and made schools of fish swim into the disciple's nets after they had fished all night and caught nothing (21:1-25). Jesus was truly a miracle-worker, as one would expect of the Messiah.

Jesus's miracles connect us to the power of God and fill our hearts with wonder and worship. They revitalize our confidence in the word of God and replenish our faith. Mostly, they validate that Jesus was indeed the Christ.

After Herod threw John the Baptist into prison (Matthew 11:2; Luke 3:20), Messiah's forerunner began doubting his ministry. He inquired of Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we



expect someone else?” This is remarkable, given that John affirmed Jesus as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). In response, Jesus says to John’s messengers, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matthew 11:4-5). Reassured by news of Jesus’s miracles, John’s doubts blew away like chaff in the wind moments before Herod beheaded him.

The Upper Room

There is more to John’s beautiful Gospel. Known as the Upper Room discourse, John 13-17 is one of the most intimate conversations Jesus had with His disciples and is mostly unique to John’s Gospel. Travel back in time nearly two thousand years ago. It is holy week in Jerusalem. Imagine yourself at a private dinner with Jesus in an undisclosed place located somewhere in the City of David. If, like Jesus, you had less than twenty-four hours to live, what would you say to your family and friends?

In the Upper Room, Jesus washed His disciples’ feet, showing them how to improve their service (13:1-20). He addressed betrayal (13:21-30), gave them a new commandment about love (13:31-35), promised to send the Holy Spirit (14:15-31), and revealed the secrets of a fruitful life (15:1-17). Jesus offered peace amid tribulation, discussed the hope of heaven, predicted His Second Coming, and comforted His confused disciples by saying, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me” (14:1-14). As heaven’s High Priest, He also prayed for His disciples (17:1-26).

Following the Upper Room discourse, John describes Jesus’s dramatic arrest and trial before Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. He records three of the seven last crises Jesus uttered from the cross, including, “Woman behold your son” (19:26-27), “I thirst” (19:28), and “It is finished” (19:30). Jesus’s resurrection from the dead



John

REASONS TO BELIEVE

is the most convincing of the sign miracles that point to Him as the incarnate Son of God (20:1-18). John closes his Gospel with a detailed account of Jesus's post-resurrection appearances, including His loving restoration of Peter, who had denied Jesus (20:19-21:25).

As presented by John, the life and times of Jesus Christ compel us to make the most important decision of our lives. Do you believe? Remember, believing *is* seeing. Believe in the Word. Believe in His works. Believe in His wisdom. Believe in His witness. And when you believe, you won't see polar bears directing traffic at the North Pole, but you will see Jesus.

OUTLINE	1:1-51	2 - 12	13 -17	18 - 21
FOCUS	Believe in the Word	Believe in His Works	Believe in His Wisdom	Believe in His Witness
KEY VERSE	1:14	3:16	14:1	20:18



Acts

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Wall Street investors often hunt for the next start-up company that might explode in growth and yield huge profits. In the tech world, for example, investors that bought shares of Microsoft, Apple, or Amazon when they were initial public offerings (IPOs) are wealthy today.

Imagine the church of Jesus Christ as an IPO two thousand years ago. Then, only a handful of people had any foresight that it would get off the ground, let alone achieve the worldwide impact envisioned by its Founder. Most of the “investors” were afraid, uneducated, and powerless against the mighty Roman Empire. The tangled religious politics in Jerusalem left them dismayed. But the church has a two-thousand-year growth history greater than the most coveted stocks listed on the Dow Jones Industrial Average or S&P 500, and it still yields eternal profits.

What happened following the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is truly an amazing story about a revolutionary Person and time. The next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible is the book of Acts, which is the inspired record of the Early Church IPO—the initial public outpouring of God’s Spirit that formed the church Jesus said He would build (Matthew 16:18).



Acts

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

The Acts of the Apostles is part of a two-volume anthology written by Luke, a medical doctor, historian, and traveling companion of the apostle Paul.²¹ Although it follows the book of John in the New Testament, Acts was always intended to be read after Luke's gospel. This is clear from the introduction of the book where Luke writes, "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen" (1:1-2). Luke also mentions the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus that lasted for forty days and calls them "many proofs" (1:3).

The purpose and nature of Acts requires no guesswork. Luke says his first volume was about "all that Jesus began to do and teach." Circle the word "began" and consider this: The words and works of Jesus Christ written about in the Gospels were merely a beginning. Some, including the devil, thought the crucifixion had brought an end to Jesus's life and ministry. How surprised they were when He walked out of that grave. Through His resurrection, Jesus said, in effect, "I'm just getting started!" Therefore, Luke's second volume, called Acts, is about what Jesus continued to do and teach through His disciples.

Unlocking Acts

Acts provides a unique bridge between the Gospels and the New Testament Epistles. Acts 1:8 is the key that unlocks our understanding of the

JESUS JUNCTURE

Acts is the story of the disciples who began fulfilling Jesus's Great Commission following His resurrection and ascension.

BIG IDEA

We are Jesus's witnesses on earth, locally and globally.

MEMORY VERSE

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

ACTS 1:8

AUTHOR AND DATE

Luke
65 A.D.



Acts

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

book and how it flows through twenty-eight chapters. Before He ascended to the Father, Jesus said to His disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Jesus laid the responsibility for bearing witness to the Gospel squarely on His disciples. But He told them to wait for the Holy Spirit, who arrived on the day of Pentecost, exactly fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits. There is no mistaking the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts and His role in the success of the church.

Chapters 1-12 detail the Spirit-filled acts of Peter in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. In chapter 8, Phillip rises to the occasion by proclaiming Christ in Samaria. His bold witness is significant, given the ethnic rift between Jews and Samaritans. Chapters 13-28 record the Spirit-empowered acts of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. With grit and grace, Paul takes the gospel to the ends of the earth. Let’s take a closer.

The Spirit-filled Acts of Peter

After Jesus’s ascension, about one hundred and twenty of His disciples remained in Jerusalem and prayed, waiting for the Holy Spirit as Jesus told them to do. During that time, Peter led the effort to replace Judas with Matthias (1:12-26). When the day of Pentecost arrived ten days after Jesus ascended to the Father, something changed dramatically. It began with “a sound like a mighty rushing wind” (2:1). Tongues of fire landed upon Jesus’s followers, and they were all “filled with the Holy Spirit.” They also began speaking in languages not previously known to them, “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (2:3).

No scene in the Bible is more monumental than the birth of the Church of Jesus Christ. The drama in Jerusalem caused some to



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think the disciples were drunk. But Peter, filled with fresh boldness, refuted their accusation. He saw what was happening as the fulfillment of Joel's Old Testament prophecy about the day when God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh (2:17; Joel 2:28-32). Then Peter preached the first sermon of the Church era, based on the resurrected Christ. Three thousand people professed faith in Jesus on that glorious day!

This was only the beginning. The new disciples enjoyed authentic biblical community, having everything in common (2:42-47, 4:32-37). "Many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ... And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

On his way to the temple with John to pray, Peter miraculously healed a lame beggar, telling him, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" (3:1-10). Peter followed with his second stirring sermon about Jesus, proclaiming Him without equivocation, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12).

The religious leaders objected, arresting the apostles for preaching the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. After charging them "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus," they released them (4:18). Peter and John responded boldly, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (4:19-20).

While surging in numbers, the Early Church experienced a brief setback when Ananias and Sapphira died for lying to the Holy Spirit about their financial giving, producing great fear among the people (5:1-11). However, God continued to work signs and wonders through the apostles, and the church grew in numbers.

Filled with jealousy, the religious leaders arrested the apostles again. Once more, Peter and the apostles replied boldly to their



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threats by saying, “We must obey God rather than men” (5:29). A respected Pharisee named Gamaliel helped cool hot heads, reminding his colleagues, “For if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” (5:38-39). Chapter 5 concludes by saying, “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus” (5:42).

The Jerusalem church grew so large that the apostles needed help responding to the many requests for physical support. While devoting themselves to prayer and preaching, they chose seven men “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” to organize care for the congregation. Stephen was among the first deacons (6:1-7). After testifying boldly before the high priest about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Stephen was stoned to death, becoming the church’s first martyr (6:8-7:60). A Pharisee named Saul, who was full of rage, approved of his execution (8:1-3).

Stephen’s stoning unleashed a greater persecution against the church in Jerusalem, scattering believers throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. One of the seven deacons named Phillip “went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ” (8:4). Later, an angel of the Lord instructed Phillip to travel south toward Gaza, a desert place, where he met an Ethiopian who served as a court official to Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians. He was reading the scroll of Isaiah, and Phillip explained to him what it said about Christ Jesus (8:4-40). The Ethiopian believed, and Phillip baptized him immediately.

Later, Peter learned that the gospel was for both Jews and Gentiles through a dream that led to a divine encounter with a centurion named Cornelius at Caesarea (10:1-48). Initially, Peter, forced to confront his pride and prejudice, objected to the idea. But after the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles, it became clear that the apostles should make disciples of all nations, baptizing even



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uncircumcised Gentiles in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter returned to Jerusalem and reported his experience to the church, and they glorified God (11:1-18).

Chapter 12 begins with sobering words, “About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword” (12:1-2). When it pleased the Jews, Herod also arrested Peter, “delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him.” The church prayed earnestly for Peter. That night, an angel of the Lord miraculously rescued him, to the surprise of those who were praying (12:4-19).

The Spirit-empowered Acts of Paul

Acts 9 records the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a religious extremist and violent persecutor of the church. Before his conversion, Saul was a Pharisee of great esteem, having been trained by Gamaliel, also a Pharisee greatly respected by the Jews. Naturally, it took time for church leaders to accept Saul’s turn to Christ, given the way he terrorized Christians. In time, Saul became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.²² At this time, church administration shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch, the place where “the disciples were first called Christians” (11:19-30).

Chapters 13-28 record Paul’s three missionary journeys, each departing from Antioch. Barnabas and John Mark (Barnabas’s nephew) join Paul on his first missionary journey (13-14) and travel with him to Cyprus, Pamphylia, Phrygia, and Lycaonia. On the island of Cyprus, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus opposed their efforts to speak the word of God to Sergius Paulus, the proconsul who had summoned the missionaries. Filled with the Holy Spirit, gritty Paul called Bar-Jesus a “son of the devil” and blinded him. When Sergius saw what happened, he believed in Christ Jesus (13:4-12).

At Iconium, “a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed.



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But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers” (14:1-2). At Lystra, after Paul heals a crippled man, the crowd mistook Paul and Barnabas for Hermes and Zeus. Later, Paul is stoned by some angry Jews who came from Antioch and Iconium. Gritty Paul got up the next day, entered the city, and departed with Barnabas (14:8-28).

Before Paul departed for his second missionary journey, a theological council met in Jerusalem to discuss whether Gentiles should live under the Law of Moses (15:1-35). Furthermore, Paul and Barnabas parted ways over a strong disagreement about John Mark, who had left the missionary team in Pamphylia for unknown reasons (15:36-41). Barnabas took John Mark and returned to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas “went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (15:41). In Lystra, a disciple named Timothy joined them.

During his second missionary journey (16:1-18:17), Paul returned to the churches he planted in Asia Minor to encourage the believers, responding also to a “Macedonian call” that he received by the Holy Spirit in a vision (16:1-10).²³ In Thyatira, a businesswoman named Lydia and her household believed and were baptized (16:11-15). Soon after, city rulers threw Paul and Silas into prison after Paul casts a demon out of a slave girl “who brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling” (16:16-24). A Philippian jailer converted after hearing Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns at midnight (16:25-40).

Other highlights of Paul’s second journey include his visit to Athens, where “his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (17:16). There, he also stood in the public marketplace, known as the Areopagus, and addressed the men of Athens about “the unknown god” (17:22-33).

From Athens, Paul made his way to Corinth and met Jewish tentmakers named Aquila and Priscilla, who joined Paul’s ministry team and mentored Apollos, an eloquent man who was competent



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in the Scriptures (18:24-28). Paul stayed for eighteen months in Corinth, “testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus” (18:5).

On his third missionary journey (18:23-21:16), Paul traveled to the Asian city of Ephesus, where he planted a church and stayed for three years before revisiting Macedonia and Greece (19-20). While in Ephesus, “God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul” (19:11). At the same time, Paul took aim at idol worshippers, resulting in “no little disturbance concerning the Way” (19:23-41).

Acts 21-28 describe Paul’s final days, including his last witness in Jerusalem, where an angry Jewish mob wanted him arrested for allegedly bringing Gentiles into the temple. When the tribune of the Roman cohort learned of a plot to assassinate Paul, he sent his prisoner to Felix, the governor in Caesarea, where Paul remained for two years. During that time, he defended the Christian faith before Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa, who sarcastically said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” (26:28).

Using his Roman citizenship, Paul appealed to Caesar. Agrippa granted the appeal and sent Paul to Rome, fulfilling the apostle’s long desire to witness for Christ in the Eternal City. Upon Paul’s arrival, Roman authorities placed him under house arrest, where he awaited his trial.

Much more could be said about the apostle Paul’s missionary journeys, including how he suffered for the sake of Christ and His mission (9:16; 2 Corinthians 11:16-33). Through it all, Paul realized that nothing else mattered compared to fulfilling the ministry he received from Christ (20:24).

If the growth of the church depended on your witness, how much would it grow? The initial public outpouring of the Holy Spirit was for all believers at the moment of salvation, giving the church the power we need to witness for Christ. Thus, embrace the words of Jesus to His disciples, “You shall be my witnesses.” Follow the examples of Peter and Paul. Believe. Be bold. Be brave.



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OUTLINE	1 - 12		13 - 28
	The Spirit-filled Acts of Peter to the Jews		The Spirit-empowered Acts of Paul to the Gentiles
	1 - 8:2	8:3 - 12	13 - 28
FOCUS	Jerusalem and Judea	Samaria	Uttermost parts of the earth
KEY VERSE	1:8	9:15	20:24



Small Group Discussion Questions



MATTHEW

1. To whom does Matthew write and why?
 2. What content does Matthew include that would be important to his audience?
 3. What major discourses did Matthew include in his gospel? What is your biggest takeaway from them?
 4. Review Matthew 24-25. What did Jesus say about the end of the age?
 5. What four events did Matthew include that validated who Jesus was at the moment He died?
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MARK

1. What is the main theme of Mark's gospel?
2. How did Mark emphasize Jesus's works and why?
3. What role did the Holy Spirit play in Jesus's life and ministry? Compare your answer to the command to "walk by the Spirit" in Galatians 5.
4. What literary decision did Mark make that emphasizes Jesus as the Suffering Servant?
5. In what way was Jesus the Special Servant?

Small Group Discussion Questions



LUKE

1. Does Luke emphasize the humanity or deity of Jesus more? How and why?
 2. What makes the Gospel According to Luke a trustworthy record of the life and times of Jesus Christ?
 3. How does Luke present the birth and boyhood of Jesus? What unique material does he provide?
 4. List three parables Luke records. Which is your favorite and why?
 5. How does Luke use his medical training to describe the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? Why is this significant?
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JOHN

1. Read John 20:31. Why did John write his Gospel?
2. Name and discuss briefly the seven “I am” statements Jesus made. What do they say about His identity?
3. Interact with John 3:16 as though for the first time. What is most impactful about it?
4. How do the miracles of Jesus point to Him being the Messiah?
5. Consider the Upper Room Discourse in John 13-17. What did Jesus say to His disciples that impacts you the most?

Small Group Discussion Questions



ACTS

1. Read Acts 1:8. How does this verse compare to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20?
2. What happened on the day of Pentecost in chapter 2? What significance does it hold for believers in Jesus Christ today?
3. Read Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. Describe the characteristics of the Early Church.
4. What impresses you about how Peter put his faith in Jesus Christ into action?
5. What impresses you about how Paul put his faith in Jesus Christ into action?

- ¹ Norman Geisler, *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pg. 94.

- ² Modern scholarship says Mark wrote his Gospel first, although the early church fathers report that Matthew wrote first.

- ³ Arnold Rothstein, Wikipedia, accessed on November 19, 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnold_Rothstein

- ⁴ See Philippians 2:10-11 and 1 Timothy 6:15.

- ⁵ The nearness of the gospel writings to the actual events adds credibility to them.

- ⁶ It was not uncommon in Jewish genealogies to leave out some names. Matthew might have chosen the number fourteen because it is twice seven, the perfect number. Or, because the numeric number of David's name in Hebrew is seven.

- ⁷ Tamar shamefully disguised herself as a prostitute to get pregnant by Judah, her father-in-law. Rahab was a prostitute, Ruth was a Moabitess, Bathsheba had an adulterous affair with King David, and Mary became pregnant when betrothed to Joseph—all culturally scandalous stories!

- ⁸ Culturally, women had little standing in the first century Matthew would not have reported that the women arrived first if it were not true.

- ⁹ Unlike Matthew, Mark does not include Jesus's major discourses like the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) or the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25). He also omits other things that would not be meaningful to his Gentile audiences, like the genealogy of Jesus plus other aspects of Old Testament law and theology.

- ¹⁰ Mark might have been referring to himself in 14:51-52 when he mentions "a young man" in Gethsemane who ran away naked.

- ¹¹ Many Early Church Fathers, including Papias, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen, affirm that Mark the Evangelist and John Mark of Acts are the same person and, and he was heavily influenced by Peter.

- ¹² Jesus also commissioned His disciples by saying, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).
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- ¹³ It is not impossible to imagine Peter, by the Holy Spirit, instructing Mark to add this detail. The Gospel According to John (21:15-19) adds the full story of Peter’s restoration by Jesus after an unsuccessful, all-night fishing trip.
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- ¹⁴ “What is the Hypostatic Union?” David Mathis, access on December 8, 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-the-hypostatic-union>
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- ¹⁵ John’s gospel traces Jesus’s lineage even further back than Adam (John 1:1-2, 14).
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- ¹⁶ The first miraculous catch of fish on the lake of Gennesaret (5:1-10) and the raising of a widow’s son from the dead in Nain (7:11-17) are unique to Luke’s gospel.
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- ¹⁷ For the prominent role women played in Jesus’s ministry, see Luke 7:11-13, 8:1-3, 10:38-42, 21:1-4, 23:27-31, 49.
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- ¹⁸ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John Volume 1*, The Daily Bible Study Series, p. 26.
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- ¹⁹ Max Lucado, *3:16: The Numbers of Hope*, p. 27.
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- ²⁰ David Jeremiah, *God Loves You*, p. 45.
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- ²¹ The book of Acts covers thirty years of transitional history, bridging the Gospels and the New Testament Epistles.
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- ²² Saul was his Jewish name; Paul was his Roman or Gentile name. Both were given to the apostle at birth. As he carries the gospel to the Gentiles, he uses his Gentile name.
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- ²³ In Acts 16:10, Luke inserts himself into the story for the first time by using a plural pronoun: “We sought to go to Macedonia.”

About the Author



RON JONES is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

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A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

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Road Trip 7: The Pauline Epistles

Road Trip 8: The General Epistles and Revelation

Ron Jones is the lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia and Bible teacher on Something Good Radio and Television. A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia Beach with his wife Cathryn. They have two adult children.

